

INVESTING IN OUR STUDENT EMPLOYEES' FUTURES: ONE PAGE AT A TIME

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hen Jeanna Miller started to work as a page at the Bittersweet Branch of the Mishawaka-Penn-Harris Public Library in May 1998, she never thought that a part-time job in a library would have such a positive effect on her college years. But that is exactly what the junior at Indiana University South Bend (IUSB) found out when the Friends of the Library awarded her a \$500 scholarship last August.

According to Miller, "I started working at the library because I loved books and reading. I thought a job at the library would be perfect." The experience has been a positive one for Miller. She achieved her initial goal of having a part-time job that she enjoyed while saving money for college. The icing on the cake came when she was a scholarship recipient in August 2001. The \$500 check made payable to Indiana University South Bend was applied directly to her tuition, and to Miller, every cent of scholarship money that can help her earn her degree at IUSB is greatly appreciated.

Miller is one of four students who received the first Student Employee Scholarships given out by the Friends of the Library for the 2001-2002 academic year. Mathew Nix, a freshman at the University of Notre Dame majoring in business and marketing, is another.

The idea of the Scholarship Program can be credited to former Friends of the Library Board Member and Liaison to Children's Programming, Ellen West. At the time, West's son was a senior in high school and was heavily involved in the scholarship process. "I began to notice there were a number of organizations in our community that gave out smaller scholarships, not large sums of money, but enough to make a difference to a student heading off to college," remembers West. "And here we were in our Friends Board meetings talking about what to do with the money we had raised. It was then that I asked ... what about a scholarship fund?"

Board members readily embraced the idea. A Scholarship Committee was formed and its members quickly took action to create the framework for the Student Employee Scholarship Program. It was decided early in the process that students would not be ex-

pected to take library science or related coursework. According to West "the program's focus was really to show our student employees that we (the community and the Friends) were supportive of their continuing education, and to thank them for their interest in working in our library." Members of the Scholarship Committee and the Friends agree that although a student's interest in a future career with the library is not a requirement for a scholarship, any student expressing interest in librarianship would certainly be encouraged!

For students planning to attend one of the colleges nearby, the program was structured to provide an added incentive for scholarship recipients to stay employed by the library. If the scholarship recipient continued to work part-time with the library while going to school full-time, he or she could apply for a renewal of the scholarship for up to a maximum of three additional years.

A final tenet of the program required that the scholarship money be used solely for tuition, fees, books, or supplies, with the scholarship check to be made payable directly to the educational institution. The program became official when the guidelines were put to paper and an application form was finalized in time for the first group of student library employees to apply by the deadline of June 30, 2001. Scholarship applicants like Miller and Nix had to meet the following requirements:

- Applicants must be seniors in high school or be enrolled in an accredited institution of higher education on a full-time basis on the date they apply;
- Applicants must be current employees of the Mishawaka-Penn-Harris Public Library [at the downtown or Bittersweet Branch location] at the time of application and must have worked at the Library for at least twelve successive months. (They do not necessarily still need to be employed at the library at the time the scholarship is awarded.);
- During the first semester of each year they receive a scholarship, applicants must be full-time students as defined by their institution; and

- Applicants must have maintained a 2.5 GPA (on a 4.0 scale) or a C+ average from the high school or accredited institution of higher education in which they are enrolled at the time of application.

The student employee's application also had to include a copy of a letter of acceptance from an accredited institution of higher education (for high school seniors or transfer students only), a copy of their transcript or grade report from the most recent semester of high school or college work, showing at least a 2.5 grade point average on a 4.0 scale, or a C+ average, and a letter of recommendation from the applicant's direct supervisor at the library.

The Scholarship Committee considered all applicants who met the above criteria. "We wanted to be fair," explains Virginia Currey, Friends of the Library Board Secretary and a member of the first Scholarship Committee, "and to recognize all of the students who had faithfully worked at the library." No one wanted to see the scholarship program turn into a competition among the students.

The Scholarship Committee's next step was to make a final recommendation in July 2001 to the Friends of the Library Board regarding the number of qualified applicants and a proposed dollar amount to be granted to each scholarship recipient. The Board approved the Scholarship Committee's recommendation and the first Student Employee Scholarship Program was a reality!

To fund the scholarships, the Friends tapped into monies raised during its four book sales a year. "We had to determine a way to come up with the money for the first year's scholarships," explains Ellen West, "but from now on, the money will be there." A special Scholarship fund was set-up with its own bank account, and one-third of the money raised in all book sales from that date forward has been deposited in this Scholarship fund. "Now, when a patron purchases materials at one of our book sales, they will be contributing in a small, but important way, to the education of students in our community," continues West.

The Scholarship Committee's guidelines allow for the amount of money granted to successful applicants to vary year to year but Friends Board President Kris Monagle hopes there will be the money available to grant \$500 scholarships (or its future equivalent) to as many student employees as qualify. "Since I've always felt that one of the library's great functions is educating the young, providing a scholarship to our student employees is a wonderful way for the Friends to help extend that mission," comments Monagle.

Current scholarship recipients like Jeanna Miller may apply to have the scholarship renewed for a maximum of three additional years, provided the student continues to work at the library while attending

college full-time. As with the initial scholarship, the student must continue to maintain a 2.5 grade point average (out of a 4.0 scale), or a C+ average. Miller has switched from paging to working at the Circulation Desk of the Bittersweet Branch Library while keeping to a full course load. Matt Nix had planned to keep his part-time position as a page at the downtown Mishawaka-Penn-Harris Public Library but by December, he found the rigors of freshman year too great to

continue off-campus employment.

A new Scholarship Committee has formed for the 2002-2003 academic year and they are busy making sure that all student employees of the library



Above: Miller at Circulation desk with a patron

who are planning to head off to college or, like Miller, continue their college education have their application and supporting documents to the committee by June 30. Everyone involved in the Student Employee Scholarship Program is committed to keeping the program viable for years to come. The Friends of the Mishawaka-Penn-Harris Public Library is proving it is wise to invest in the futures of the library's student employees — even if it is just one page at a time.

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